



JOSE ROSALES 2017-11-30

THE GIRL WITH THE BOMB, THE GUARDIAN OF DYNAMITE: NOTES ON THE POLITICS OF BECOMING-WOMAN

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THE GIRL WITH THE BOMB, THE GUARDIAN OF DYNAMITE: NOTES ON THE POLITICS OF BECOMING-WOMAN

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[Excerpt from a piece on D&G, gender, struggle, and communism as the real movement that abolishes itself and the present

state of things]

In the tenth chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, '1730: Becoming-intense, becoming-animal...', one is presented with a sequence of memories and drawn from such a diversity of individuals and conceptual-personae that the sequence itself appears to make very little sense if read as one single extended argument for Deleuze and Guattari's particular understanding of becoming. Rather, what we encounter are the memories of a Spinozist, a theologian, a sorcerer, and a plan(e) maker, among others. However, buried near the middle of the chapter, in the section entitled '*Memories of a Molecule*', where we encounter a discussion on the role of becoming-woman and the figure of the (universal) girl as they relate to both becoming in general and becomings within the domain of politics and history. Thus they write: "*The special role of the girl in Russian terrorism: the girl with the bomb, the guardian of dynamite?*"[1]

While it is clear that, at least for Deleuze and Guattari, the girl of Russian terrorism played the role of the guardian of the bomb and of dynamite, what is not at all clear is the *reason* for why they attribute this special role to the girl in the first place. Is it simply a case of elevating what is particular (in this case to Russian history) in order to treat it as a general principle or maxim? And should it not strike us as strange that Deleuze and Guattari give any example at all—let alone that of the girl of Russian terrorism—since it would present what is tempting in the error of conflating *becoming* with imitation or role-play, and instead of employing the girl as the means of instituting a break with one's present material conditions (and which one of us hasn't encountered a situation where they start to desire, whether from desperation or insomniac exhaustion, a revival of the Red Army Faction or Red Brigades? Or succumb to the hallucination that abolishing capital can be achieved simply through replicating the structure and organization created by the Zapatistas or even the YPG?).

Now, one possible interpretation would be to try and locate the reasons and causes that lead Deleuze and Guattari to attribute speciality to this 'role of the girl in Russian terrorism' wholly within the political movements and traditions of Russia itself. The temptation of this reading is that its method leads one directly to a rich and largely forgotten dimension of the individuals and organizations that helped pave the way for the atmosphere of the 1917 revolution. Proceeding in this manner, one immediately encounters lives women such as the one of Maria Spiridonova:

On 16 January 1906 at the Borisoglebsk railroad station in Tambov province, 21-year-old Mariya Aleksandrovna Spiridonova, daughter of a non-hereditary noble and member of the Socialist-Revolutionary (SR) Party, shot and fatally wounded provincial government councilor Gavril Nikolaevich Luzhenovskiy, the security chief of the Borisoglebsk district as well as a leader of the Tambov branch of the right-wing Union of the Russian People. The Tambov SR committee had sentenced Luzhenovskiy to die "for his criminal flogging to death and excessive torturing of peasants during the agrarian and political disorders" of the autumn of 1905, as Spiridonova afterward explained in her deposition to Tambov court authorities. "In full agreement with this sentence and in full consciousness of my action," she stated, "I took it on myself to carry out this sentence." [2]

However, as an unintended consequence of this view is the very discovery of what was special about the girl of Russian terrorism is at the same time the qualities neutralization. For if this quality only belongs to Russian terrorism between the late 1800's and early 1900's, what are we to understand when Deleuze and Guattari write that they are "certain that molecular politics proceeds via the girl and the child." [3]

Conversely, one could read 'the girl of Russian terrorism,' with her special function as a function relative to the war-machine to which it belongs. That is, the part played by this girl of Russian terrorism can also be found in struggles outside of the Russian context; the special role, then, would simply arise from the requirements of any struggle undertaken against the State. On this view, what is special about the girl exceeds the historical cases one may find in Russia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century of armed struggle and direct action against a Tsarist state. What is special to the girl in Russian terrorism is only what allows her to institute becomings in the midst of overall capture by the State and its generalized stratification in accord with the universal axiom of capital (produce for the market). As Deleuze and Guattari put it, "The girl is like the block of becoming that remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult. It is not the girl who becomes a woman; it is becoming-woman that produces the universal girl." [4]

The special role of the girl in Russian terrorism, then, is the fact that she functions as that which maintains or initiates processes of destratification, deterritorialization, molecular becomings, and searches for what is potentially liberatory in lines of flight. Thus, it is true that the quality proper to this girl of Russian terrorism is a *general* feature of the kind of subjectivity defined as a war-machine; it is seen in every action taken by the war-machine and confront the (actual or virtual) State by means of what Deleuze and Guattari call 'the three virtues': the impersonal, imperceptible, and indiscernible. To further emphasize the irreducibility of the girl's significance with respect to the historical and material conditions at the turn of the century Russia, we turn our attention to another example where we encounter, once more, this special role of the girl (i.e. her function as transport and guardian of explosives): the anti-colonial struggle undertaken by the National Liberation Front (FLN.).

"...the girl as a fugitive being cannot be perceived."



With the FLN., we encounter once again the phenomena of how girls with bombs act as partisans of an anti-colonial war-machine. In other words, if the girl of Russian terrorism effectuates a becoming-woman that is also at work in the context of the FLN's struggle against Algeria's colonial occupation by France it is because becoming-woman is fundamentally an attribute belonging, not to any particular historico-political movement, but to the deterritorializing function of the war-machine wherever it takes hold. It is only by understanding how it is only in the presence of a war-machine that we may speak of becoming-woman as one of its constituent parts. It is in this way that we get a better sense as to why Deleuze and Guattari claim that the becomings that constitute political struggles against the State find 'their necessary condition [in] the becoming-woman of the warrior, or his alliance with the girl, his contagion with her'; to understand why it is that 'the man of war is inseparable from the Amazons.'^[5]

In scenes such as the one above, taken from Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, Pontecorvo shows his audience how FLN. women succeed in infiltrating the French quarters of Algiers—a task made especially difficult since these areas of the city were surveilled and protected by French police checks. Thus, this scene's significance is due to its depiction of the necessary relationship between the girl-as-guardian-of-the-bomb and the war machine in itself. And regarding such scenes, Peter Matthews formulates the function of the FLN women as follows:

The acid test of this comes in the unforgettable sequence where three Algerian women plant bombs at various crowded hangouts in the French quarter. Masquerading as loose-living Europeans, carrying mortality in a shopping basket, they would be sinister femmes fatales in another context...If we can accept the grievous necessity of these deaths, then we consent to everything. Pontecorvo has penetrated our Western self-absorption and let in the harsh light of reality.^[6]

Now, aside from the fact that Matthews' sentimentalism regarding the actions of the three Algerian women, his is a reaction that is of no use for understanding the relationship between gender, sex, and revolutionary struggle. It must be said, however, that what we find misleading in Matthews' account of the FLN's very own 'femme fatales' is the claim that affirming the violence enacted by the FLN means that we affirm a politics that 'consents to everything' by necessity. Allying with the FLN isn't to consent to a situation where anything is permissible. Rather, the logic of the FLN war machine is precisely the logical steps colonized subjects *must take* for their collective emancipation.

The horror that 'we consent to everything' simply masks the fact that it is only by going to war that the colonized has any chance at liberation. Thus, more than some fear regarding the loss of morality in colonial contexts we are obliged to underscore the reappearance of that 'special role of the girl' Deleuze and Guattari found in Russian terrorism. Now, however, this girl finds herself far from Russia and on African shores; here she runs and hides in the alleyways of the casbah in order to evade capture and continue the anti-colonial struggle. And what of becoming-woman in all this? And the 'special role' of the girl related to the aims of the war machine? If it is the case, as D&G claim, that waging war is the best means of warding off state, then the function of becoming-woman is to aid the war machine in ensuring the non-existence, or abolition of, the State:

just as Hobbes saw clearly that *the State was against war, so war is against the State*, and makes it impossible. It should not be concluded that war is a state of nature [an error that grounds Matthews' fear], but rather that it is the mode of a social state that wards off and prevents the State.^[7]

Unlike Matthews, D&G understand it as imperative, in the confrontation between the FLN and the colonial violence of France, to differentiate the actions of each from the other in order not to confuse or conflate both. Consequently, for D&G, this means that we lack any right/legitimacy in saying that only a state of nature exists (as implied by Matthews) between the war machine and

the State since it's a confrontation the nature of which 'consents to everything'; a confrontation wherein the actions of both the FLN and France can only be treated as having *equal* ethico-political value. If the FLN constructed its own war-machine and correlating becoming-woman, it means, then, that the actions of the FLN and France are not only unequal; more importantly, they are incommensurable with each other. As seen in the passage above, it is the State that seeks to prevent war while it is the war machine that seeks to prevent the existence of States. If the actions of the FLN and the State cannot be treated as equal, it is because their respective political projects involve the mutual exclusion of their opposite. While it may be the case, objectively speaking, that the colonial context held open a number of possible resolutions to anti-colonial struggles (liberation, neo-colonialism, genocide), for the FLN liberation was always the only legitimate option.

ENDNOTES

[1] ATP, 277
[2] Boniece, 'The "Shesterka" of 1905-06
[3] ATP, 277
[4] Ibid.
[5] ATP, 278
[6] Matthews, 'Bombs and Boomerangs'
[7] ATP, 357
[8] Ibid, 308.

taken from here

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META
CONTACT
FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX
IMPRESSUM
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